

Opinion Piece

First Contact Resolution

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This opinion piece considers the effect of improving first contact resolution rates that can have on both costs and customer or citizen satisfaction.

Numerous metrics have been used over many years to determine the overall performance levels of the contact centre. These have included average hold time, calls handled per agent and average call duration and metrics specific to sales based contact centres, that focus on sales value per call/per agent. However, in this article we are going to consider the measurement that many believe is the most important for the support or service orientated contact centre, whether in the public or private sector.

Why First Contact Resolution?

Until recently, the geeks from the contact centre world have defined the abbreviation FCR as First Call Resolution; it would seem more appropriate in today's multi-media world that we change this definition to First *Contact* Resolution. This is since the aim of the contact centre is assist customers and citizens in any way that is most appropriate and we should consider our web site, our social media activity and our use of other communications techniques to form a part of our overall contact centre strategy.

Why is FCR so important? Metrics provide a health check for a contact centre; often there is a greater focus on reducing call times rather than looking at the complete picture. The real metric that should be captured is time to resolution and is typically kept considerably lower when the call is resolved in the first attempt; that more and more customers are expecting. The real benefit of improving FCR rates is one of the few targets that are always a win-win.

Improved FCR rates will not only increase customer satisfaction, they will simultaneously improve cost effectiveness. At a time when all organisations, particularly those in the public sector, are trying to do more with less, this is vitally important.





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How do we measure First Contact Resolution Rates and what is a reasonable target?

The answer to the first questions tends to be “with difficulty” and, to the second, “it all depends”. This may not seem particularly helpful, but there are some ways through this maze.

Measurement will almost certainly have to come in a number of forms, because the judgement as to when a contact has been resolved is very often subjective. For example, an agent may end a call by asking “Has that solved your query?” and the caller may well believe that it has. The call is then marked down as a tick for FCR. However a follow up call may subsequently be required in circumstances where the solutions turns out to be temporary or simply leads on to a further query in an ongoing chain of events. We need to add other techniques to self recording to get a better view of the overall FCR rates.

These techniques are likely to include call monitoring and review, where a supervisor or independent arbiter can judge whether or not resolution was reached, and customer surveys where client feedback can be entered into the mix. Where the contact centre offers multi-media services the use of a range of techniques is clearly the only option, and web based self-serve contact centres lend themselves particularly well to on-line customer satisfaction surveys. What is important is that measurements are taken regularly and frequently so that changes in FCR patterns can be adequately monitored.



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When considering what is a good level of first contact resolution, it is necessary to remember, this will always vary from centre to centre, as the nature of calls will be different. What is excellent in some circumstances could well be very poor in others. That is why it is important to monitor improvement over time. By keeping the monitoring process constant it should be possible to assess the effect, positive or otherwise of all measures taken to improve rates.

How can technology help?

Technology can help to improve both the efficiency of the contact centre in general and FCR rates in particular, but technology alone will not be the entire solution, as we shall see later.

Assuming that the contact centre has good call handling, skills based routing, queuing and display systems, the key technologies that should also be considered are:-

- Presence based systems. The ability to locate, and determine the availability of a subject matter expert (SME) are key to being able to improve first contact resolution rates.
- Instant messaging. By being able to make quick contact with an SME, the agent is able to assess both availability and likelihood of first call success. Where IM systems are integrated into the agent's desktop a series of questions from the agent to SMEs can be fired off during the call.
- Multi media. By giving customers and citizens a range of options, they can choose which is most appropriate to each query. Using the web for problem resolution, customers can be encouraged to use email or text to log calls, or to access and participate in user forums. Facebook and Twitter can be used as entry points into the contact centre.



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- Video. Broadband and video enabled devices are now common. Adding video to a contact can help boost first contact resolution rates by allowing the agent to demonstrate simple techniques, or view the product with which the customer has a problem. Think how much easier it would be to show someone how to wire a plug rather than explaining it.

As noted above, technology, smart as it is, is not the whole answer. The successful implementation of contact centre systems requires the development of a close relationship between client and supplier, in that the supplier has the in-depth skills and understanding to become immersed in the detail of the client’s business. The supplier must have proven methodologies that guarantee an effective implementation. Often overlooked, as the modern contact centre draws on numerous disciplines for its success, the supplier must have a broad base of in-house capability to meet these demands. This range of skills will include, desk top systems, call centre and voice technology, video, social media and security experience. In addition there are always various hosting options that need to be considered as many contact centres are now delivered as managed services or a Cloud based solutions.

What else?

Finally, if you really want to improve first contact resolution rates, do not forget the importance of agent training. Well trained agents who are confident in their environment will handle calls quickly and efficiently. They’ll cost a lot less as well as attrition rates will be far lower.

